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AN ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL
HELD AT GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS,
APRIL 15, 1712.

AT a meeting of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, held in Boston on Thursday, November 9, 1899, Dr. SAMUEL A. GREEN, in presenting an old manuscript, said :—

The following paper, recently brought to light, gives about the only information we have of an Ecclesiastical Council, held at Groton, on April 15, 1712, which was called to consider the troubles between Mr. Bradstreet, the minister, and the church. The exact nature of the complaints then made by his parishioners is not known, but from the answers to some of the charges, their general character may be surmised. It has been thought that the troubles grew out of Mr. Bradstreet's Episcopal tendencies, but by the light of the manuscript this theory seems untenable. The paper itself is not the original report of the Council, but a contemporaneous copy of the same. Both from the style of writing and from the spelling it appears to be in the hand of Jonas Prescott, an inhabitant of Groton, who at that period was prominent in the affairs of both church and town. While he may have been illiterate himself, like most men of his times, and unused to scholarly ways, he became the ancestor of a long line of families distinguished in many different walks of life.

The Council consisted of five ministers or elders, and nine lay delegates or messengers. The ministers were the Rev. Grindall Rawson, of Mendon, who acted as Moderator of the Council; Rev. John Hancock, of Lexington, grandfather of the Signer; Rev. Joseph Baxter, of Medfield; Rev. John Swift, of Framingham; and Rev. John Prentiss, of Lancaster. The messengers were Thomas Wilder and John Houghton, of Lancaster; Samuel Stone and Joseph Bowman, of Lexington; Jonathan Boyden and Samuel Roocit (Rockwood), of Medfield; David Ryse (Rice) and Joshua Hemenway, of Framingham; and John Tyler, of Mendon.

At a Councel of five Churches Called by y^e Reud mr dudly brodstret and the disatisfied bretherin of the Church of Crist in Groton & held in sd Groton April 15: 1712 refering to the unhapy difference between them wee the subscribers Convened at the time and plase aboue sd & hauing Earnstly Implored the help of all mity God and herd & Examined Euedinces and allagations one all sids do aduise and determin as foloueth

Impremise or Impny That the aduise tack plase as to the first articol in the Charg which the reuernt Eldrs which were with them in nouembr y^e [date omitted] 1710 did giue them namly that nither mr brodstret nor others should insist one the charges mad by them that could not be mad out Concidring the ouer of temptation thay were in & that a contry corse mit haue a tendency to Cast them in to further and grater confusions

II as to thee woord raysing in y^e 2 articoll the sudscribers to the charge desiered it mit be with drawne as to mr brodstrets reporting the story refered to in the sd Charge mr brodstret has giuen ampel satisfaction particklerly to Thomas Tarboll iuner y^e parson Imedatly Conearned and the 4 brethren whoo sined the sd Charge publickly de clared them selues satisfied

III Concidring y^e unaccountabol parplexity and Contridixon of Euedinces refering to y^e 3^d articol uise y^e charge layed against mr brodstret for abominadle Cariage towherds towerds [sic] the wife of Samuell Keemp wee are not aboll to de termin for the present one which side the truth lyes & there fore shall leue it to farther concidration untill wednesday y^e 18 day of June next insuing at malbray unto which time and place we do agorne the councel hoping that thare may bee sumthing more of lite by that time gained by the help of which wee may be Enabled to pas to a more full determination

IIII whers the reuorant mr brodstret is Charged with Immodst actions at the house of Samenell Communes one a satudday night we find the Euedinces in that Case so Conuycetine that we determin it to be mr brodstrets duty to submit to the Euedinces and mack satisfaction according to gossell rull

V the fifth and sixt articls in the Charges Exhidited to us ware re-

VI caled by the disatisfied brethren them selues & therefore we find no reson to tack it in to our thouts too determin any thing apone them

we cannot but Expres the grat & afflicttiue sence we haue of the lamantabl condison ouer beloued brethren are in & of the sufering state of religion among them by reson of the long continueed and Exercising differences & diuesons where bey their pese and quieat haue bin ob structed & it is with Extreme sorou and affliction of sperit wee be hould the diffrences arision be twene y^e reurend mr dud brodstret and the disatisfied brethren and other inhabintence be come so wide & grate as for bid us to hope for such reconcilation betwene them as may of fer a prouibel prospect of the con tinuance of the relation thay stand in Each to other comfortable to either and do therefore beleue it to

be y^e most hopefull Expedaent to their peese and comfort that the Church of Crist and in haditance of Groton do frely Consent that the reurend mr dudly bradstt may re moue from them & wee beleue it will Conduse to his oune Comfort to exsept that liberty when aloued him: wee funder ad that in order to his pesoble remoue from them it is their duty to maintaine a Du regard to his iust rits according to thare a greement with hime upone his setlement with them in the pastorl offise whilst this be dune wee cannot supepose thay will dell iustly with him nor comfortably for them selues & to y^r prouiding to a nu settlement finely we Judge it the duty of paster and pepel to humbell them selues under the the [*sic*] ueru sever and Just & holy prouidence of God in per miting satou the Enemy of souls so long to inuad & imhors thare peese & to be uery lawfull to in quier into the causes of God anger & holy indignation manifest in so sore & humdling a dispershou of prouidence touerds them and we beleue it their duty to beg that God would shou to Euery of them where in thay haue dun a mis to be waill it be fore God & to ask importinaty his pardoning marsey throu the bloud of a gracious & all mity redemer to hear the falt of these misers of iniquitys which cannot be by ouer most thout full & Cristell Endeuers Come att lyes where not able to determin but the holy god is the sercher of all harts beleue it tis the dudy of all parsons concerned to consider it and to act acording ly that thay may not liue and dye with out indeuers af ter reconceilaton to God in order to y^e ob taining for giuenes it shall be ouer prayer to god that thay may in gods time which the lord in marsey hasen see a comfortadl eshue of all thare troubles one the acount of which thay haue bin grat thoughts & serching of harts we pray that ouer endeuers touers bringing one of such an ishue may be Exceptable to god whose presence we haue desiered & whoos rules we haue acordingly to ouer light a lowed & to thos whoo here Desiered ouer presens with thaare and ouers result one the perticulers laid before us whome we recomend to the mersefull fauer & Conduct of gracous God and subscrid ouer selues youre serunts for Crists sack

grindall roson mod

John hancock

Josef baxter

John Swift

John Prentis

Thomas Wilder

John houton

Sameuel Stoon

Jonathan boydon

David Ryse mesengers

Sameuell roocit

Josheuh hemingway

Joseph bowman

John Tyeler

[Endorsed] the ad uis. of a Counsill of eldrs & mesingers



According to the answer given to the third Article, the Council adjourned to meet at Marlborough, on June 18, 1712. While there is no record extant of what was then done at this adjourned meeting, the general result of the proceedings, and the action of the town thereon, may be gathered from the following entries in the Groton town-records (page 24) :—

Whereas at A Metting of the Reu^d Elders & messengers lately convened At Grotton april 15 1712 & at the meting of said Reu^d Elders & messengers at Malbrô June 18^o 1712 upon adiournmen Advice hath been ginen to the Reu^d M^r dudley Bradstret Pastor of the church in Grotton & to the church of Christ there that the s^d church & town should forthwith proseed to dismis the said M^r Bradstret from his office bond & Relation to them as the most probable expedient in their Judgment to promote their peace & comfort

In pursuance of the abone specified Advice the church of Christt In Grotton declare and It is noted that the Reud M^r dudley Bradstret is dismissed from & is discharged of his pastorall Relation & office Obligation to the church of Grotton noted also that our Bretheren capt prescot simon stone Jonas prescot ir be desiered & are impowred to present the aboue written notes of the church to the Inhabitanes of the town of Grotton for thair concurrence & to joyn with such person or persons as the town shall appoint to presant these uots & the towns concurrence therewith to the Reud M^r Bradstret

GROTON July 22 1712

At a Meting of the Inhabitants of the town of Grotton legalley warned to consider certain uotes of the church of Christ in Grotton Refaring to th^r discharging the Reud: M^r dudley Bradstret from his Pastorall Relation to th^m & his office bond to sd church = noted that the town doth concur with the uots of the church refering to M^r brodstrets dismission as a boue expresed & that the Inhabitants of sd Grotton doe release the sd M^r Bradstret from the Relation he stands in to them as their minister

noted also that Nathanill Woods Ephrim Parc with capt prascot simon ston Jonas Prascot ir Chosen by the church to present the uotes to the town at this presant meeting of the Inhabitants be a commitey on the behalf of the town to presant the uots of the church & town to the Reud M^r Bradstret

GROTON July 24

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